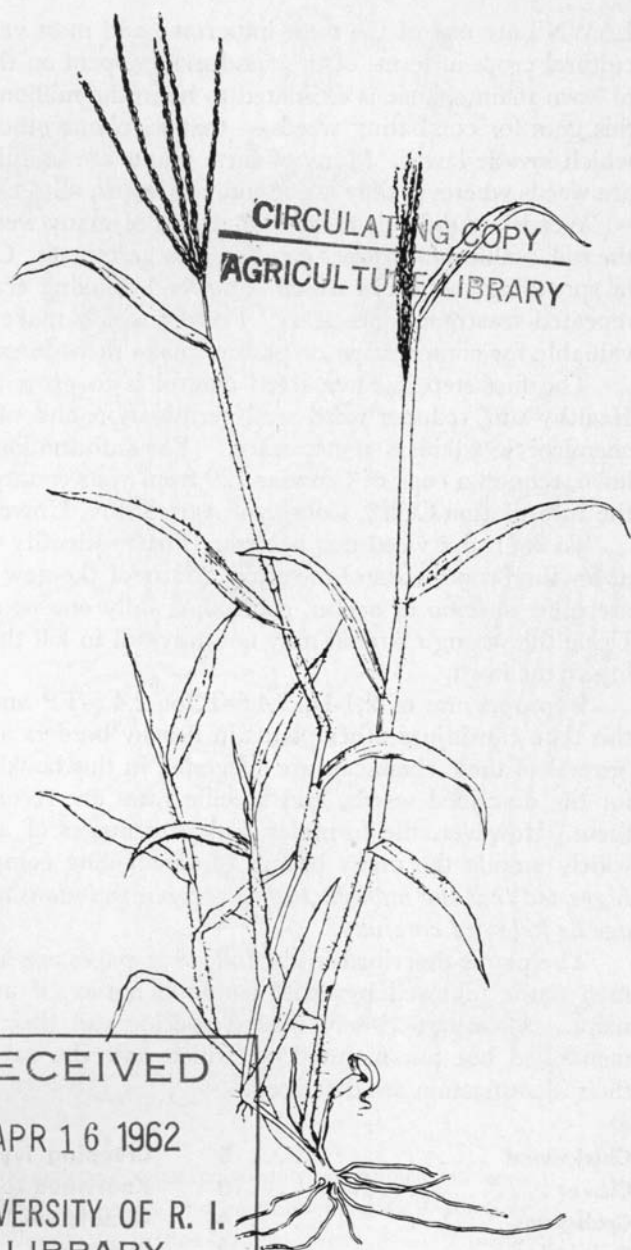




A  
DOZEN  
WEEDS  
IN  
YOUR  
LAWN



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By James A. Fizzell

CIRCULAR 847

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS • COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE  
EXTENSION SERVICE IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS

LAWNS are one of the most important and most valuable of all our agricultural crops in terms of time and money spent on them. The annual cost of lawn maintenance is estimated to be in the millions of dollars. Much of this goes for combating weeds — that is, plants other than desired grasses which invade lawns. Many of these plants are useful in their place, others are weeds wherever they are found. In lawns, all are weeds.

Weeds are difficult to control. Seeds of many weeds live a long time in the soil, waiting for proper conditions to germinate. Other weeds have deep or spreading rootstocks which store food, making eradication difficult and repeated treatments necessary. Factors which make some of these plants valuable for conservation or pasture make them formidable foes in a lawn.

The first step in lawn weed control is to grow a good, vigorous turf. Healthy turf reduces weed seed germination and often makes the use of chemical weedkillers unnecessary. (For information on growing a good lawn, request a copy of Circular 729 from your county farm adviser or from the Information Office, College of Agriculture, University of Illinois.)

To control a weed it is necessary first to identify the weed, and then to apply the proper control measure. Many of the new weedkilling chemicals are quite specific in action, controlling only one or a few kinds of weeds. Using the wrong material may not only fail to kill the weeds, but may also injure the lawn.

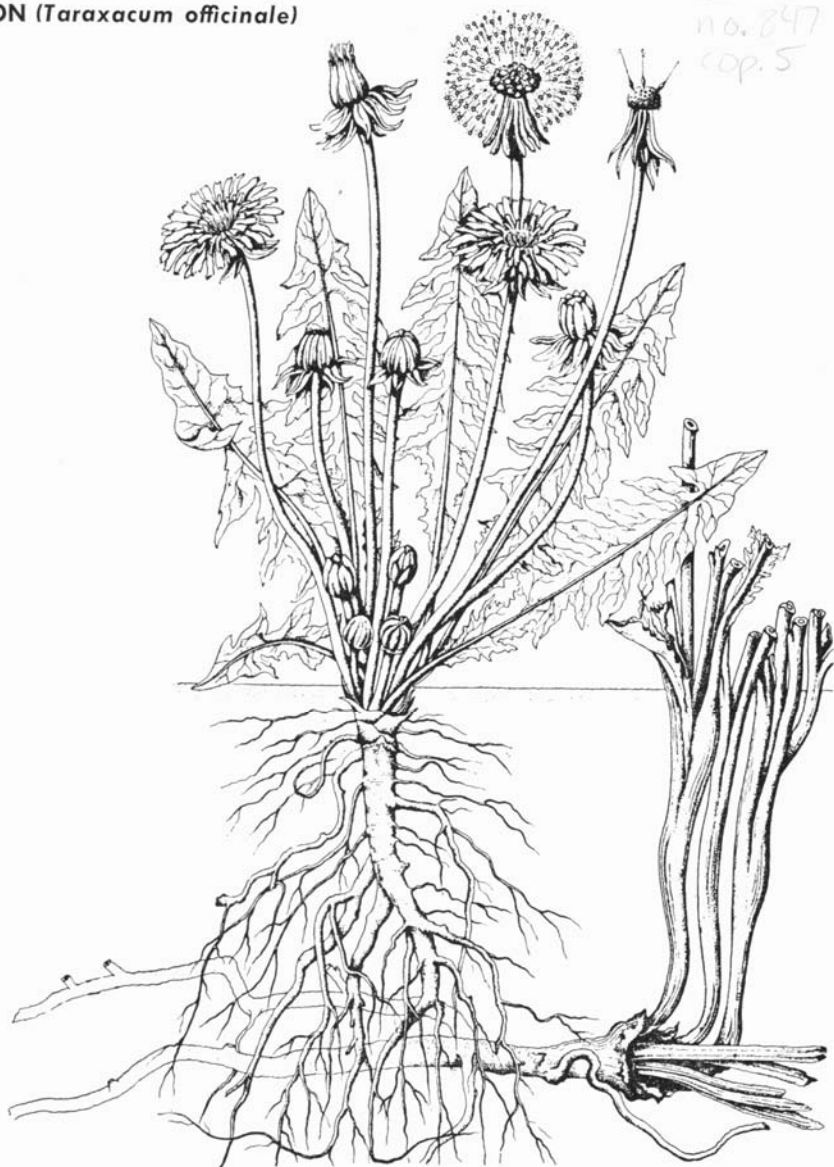
Improper use of 2,4-D, 2,4,5-T, or 2,4,5-TP and other weedkillers of this type can injure other plants in nearby borders and neighboring yards. Several of these chemicals are suggested in this booklet as control measures for the described weeds, and specific rates are recommended for some of them. However, the formulas and percentages of active ingredients vary widely among the many brands of weedkilling compounds. *It is strongly suggested that the manufacturer's recommendations as printed on the package be followed carefully.*

The plants described in the following pages are listed by the most common name followed by other common names, if any, and the botanical name. Sometimes closely related species and their botanical names are mentioned but not pictured, in which case the varying characteristics in their identification are described.

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DANDELION (*Taraxacum officinale*)

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The dandelion is probably the most commonly known of all lawn weeds. Dandelions are perennials and reproduce easily from seed or root sections. The deeply cut leaves form a rosette 6 to 12 inches in diameter. The flowers are a yellow head containing many florets. Seed is produced without pollination.

**CONTROL:** Apply weedkillers of the 2,4-D type to foliage at any time during the growing season. Treat old plants several times if necessary, or dig to remove the root.

**LARGE-CRABGRASS, Hairy Crabgrass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*)**

**CRABGRASS, Smooth-Crabgrass, Small-Crabgrass (*D. ischaemum*)**

Crabgrass is the most serious lawn weed in Illinois and other north central states. Crabgrass is an annual, germinating from seed after late May and dying with the first frost. A single plant each year produces a tremendous number of seeds that remain viable (capable of sprouting) in the soil for several years. For all practical purposes, it should be considered that crabgrass seed is present in all soils throughout the north central states.

Crabgrass seedlings are light green with leaves wider than those of turf grasses. As the plants mature the stems grow longer and the characteristic "finger-branched" flower head develops. The stems have a habit of lying down and often escape mowing.

**CONTROL:** Crabgrass control can be aimed either at destroying the plants, or at preventing them from getting started. To prevent crabgrass invasion, maintain a thick turf and cut no shorter than  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches to create enough shade to prevent germination of crabgrass seed. Elimination of broadleaf weeds in late summer, and heavy fertilization of turf to stimulate growth in fall and spring will produce a crabgrass-resistant lawn by late May.

Several good pre-emergent chemicals that kill weeds as they germinate have recently been developed or tested. Dacthal, Zytron, calcium arsenate, lead arsenate, and diphenatril have given consistently good results. Several other chemicals appear promising.

DSMA (di-sodium methyl arsonate) and AMA (amine methyl arsonate) are post-emergent materials that destroy plants after they appear above ground. These compounds are most effective when plants are small. Larger plants require repeated treatments for complete control.

Brands of chemical crabgrass killers vary greatly in formula and in strength of the active materials. The manufacturer's recommendations printed on the package should be followed carefully.



**CHICKWEED (*Stellaria media*)**

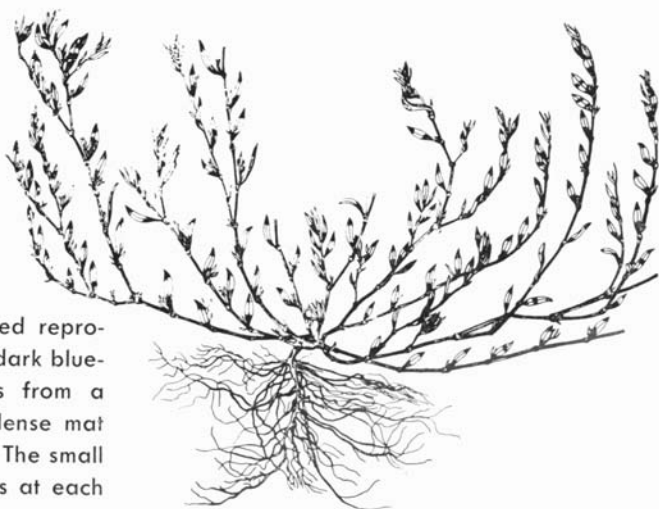
**MOUSE-EAR CHICKWEED (*Cerastium vulgatum*)**

The chickweeds are among the most persistent of lawn pests. They easily penetrate thick turf, and survive mowing. Chickweed (annual) and mouse-ear chickweed (perennial) both are propagated by seed and rooting of stems at the nodes. The stems are much branched and creeping, forming a low, spreading plant. The flowers are quite small, borne in clusters, and are white with five notched petals. Whereas common chickweed is quite smooth, mouse-ear chickweed is covered with fine hairs. Mouse-ear chickweed is more difficult to kill but does not seem to spread through a lawn as fast as common chickweed.

**CONTROL:** Make repeated applications of weedkillers of the 2,4,5-TP or 2,4,5-T type. Spot-treatment with arsenic-containing compounds is often helpful.



**KNOTWEED, Doorweed**  
*(Polygonum aviculare)*



Knotweed is an annual weed reproduced only from seed. It is dark blue-green in color and grows from a central taproot to form a dense mat 4 to 12 inches in diameter. The small flowers are borne in clusters at each node. Knotweed withstands close cutting, drouth, and trampling. It often grows in hard, trampled areas such as play yards or paths.

**CONTROL:** Single plants are easily removed by pulling. Kill large areas with 2,4,5-TP or endothal. Repeat treatment on large plants if they show signs of recovery.

**CREeping IVY, Creeping  
Charlie, Ground Ivy**  
*(Nepeta hederacea)*



Creeping ivy is a low-growing perennial weed that is propagated by seeds and rooting stems. The stems are 15 to 30 inches long and four-sided, forming roots at the nodes. Crushed stems or leaves have a minty odor. The small blue flowers are borne in clusters in the axils of the leaves. Creeping ivy is usually

more prevalent in shady, moist areas.

**CONTROL:** Rake the plants from the lawn, or treat with 2,4,5-TP. Creeping ivy is often difficult to eradicate.

**GOOSEGRASS, Silver Crabgrass, ►  
Yardgrass (*Eleusine indica*)**

Goosegrass is an annual weed which, because of its fingerlike flower head, is often confused with crabgrass. Unlike crabgrass, goosegrass is dark green and grows in tufts. The stems may be upright but usually grow along the ground and are missed in mowing. The leaves are smooth, papery, and 3 to 12 inches long.

**CONTROL:** Measures which eliminate crabgrass usually prevent invasion by goosegrass.



**◄ NIMBLEWILL (*Muhlenbergia schreberi*)**

Often confused with crabgrass, nimblewill is a hardy perennial grass, reproduced by seed and numerous fine stolons. The stems are slender and branching, rooting at the lower nodes. A single plant may form a dense patch one foot or more in diameter. The leaves are short and pointed, giving the clump a prickly appearance.

**CONTROL:** Plants are easily pulled if noticed when small. Treat large plants with dalapon (see quackgrass).



**TALL FESCUE, Alta Fescue, Kentucky 31 Fescue**  
(*Festuca elatior* var. *arundinacea*)

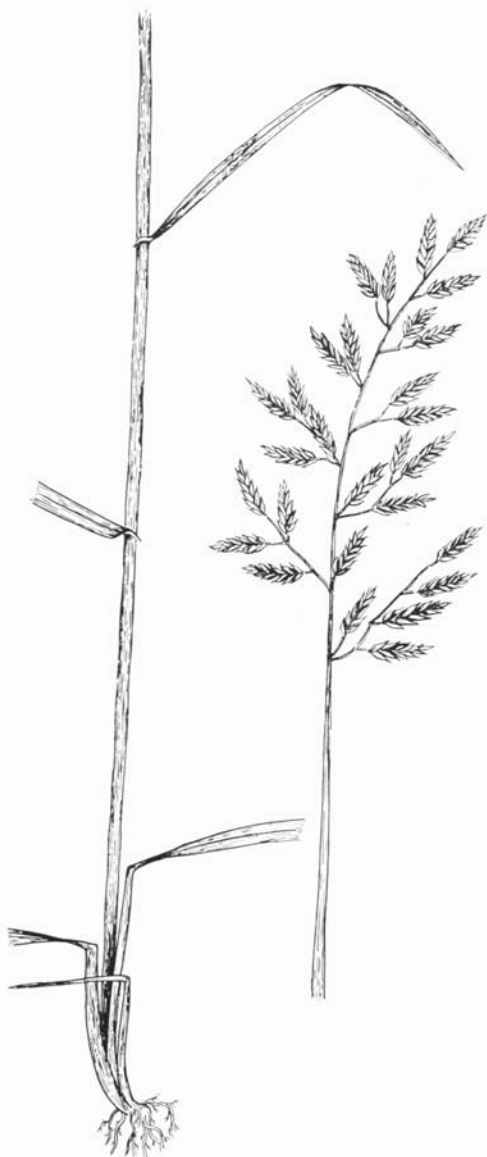
The fescues are a valuable family of grasses. Several varieties, including tall fescue, are valuable as pasture and forage grasses. Selections of red fescue (*F. rubra*) are fine-leaved and are the best lawn grasses for shady areas in Illinois and surrounding states.

Tall fescue is a robust, aggressive, perennial grass, drought-resistant and able to stand abuse. It is used extensively in football fields and playgrounds. Thickly sown, it makes a durable, dense sod.

In lawns, tall fescue is coarse, tends to fall over, escaping mowing, and crowds out the finer grasses. It is therefore considered a weed in bluegrass lawns.

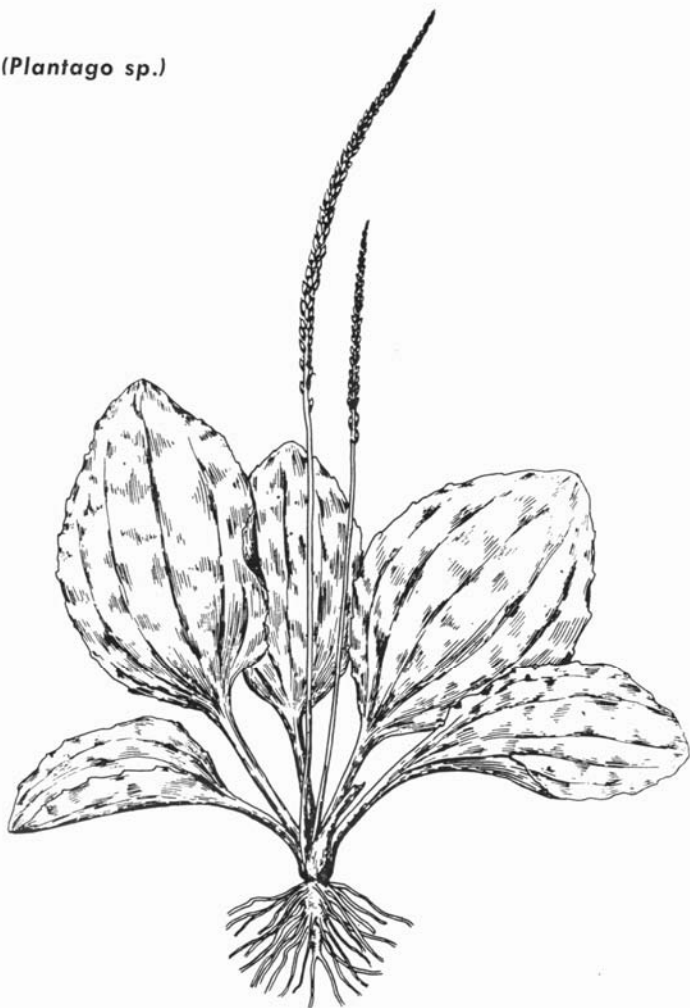
Tall fescue seldom seeds itself in a lawn but spreads by tillering—that is, it produces many new stems within a clump as compared with creeping or producing new stems outside the clump. This results in an ever-enlarging tuft of coarse grass. Tall fescue is often included in cheap seed mixtures and usually gains entrance to lawns in this manner.

**CONTROL:** Avoid seed mixtures containing tall fescue. Handpull small clumps, or treat large patches with dalapon. (See quackgrass.)





**PLANTAIN (*Plantago* sp.)**



Several species of plantain are lawn weeds, including common or broadleaf plantain (*P. major*) and buckhorn plantain or ribgrass (*P. lanceolata*). Leaves of the varieties differ in shape but are similar in structure with coarse, parallel veins. The leaves form a basal rosette from which grow the flower spikes. Plantain is a shallow-rooted perennial which propagates from seed.

**CONTROL:** Apply 2,4-D during the growing season, repeating the treatment as necessary. Large plants are easily removed by digging.

## CLOVER (*Trifolium* sp.)

Several species of clover become pests in lawns. The characteristics that make these plants valuable as pasture or conservation crops — deep roots, the ability to thrive in infertile soil, and resistance to close cropping — make them difficult to eradicate in a lawn. Clover spreads from seed and also from roots formed at each node. It spreads easily and rapidly and, being a legume, it successfully outgrows grass in soil that is low in nitrogen.

**CONTROL:** Lawn grasses will compete with clover if they are kept actively growing with adequate nitrogen fertilization. Kill established clover with repeated applications of 2,4,5-T, 2,4,5-TP, or endothal, applied each time the treated plants begin to recover. Several applications may be needed.



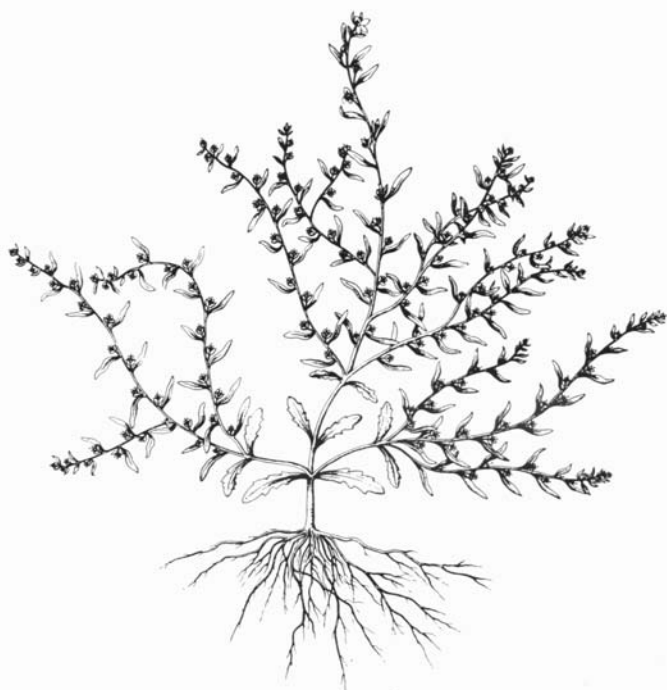
**QUACKGRASS, Couchgrass**  
**(*Agropyron repens*)**

Quackgrass is a perennial grass weed which is reproduced by seed and from sections of underground stems, from which it spreads rapidly. Quackgrass is used for conservation because of its ability to take hold in difficult locations. This makes it a stubborn weed if it is growing where it is not wanted.

**CONTROL:** Handweed small areas. Kill large, solid areas with dalapon. Since dalapon kills all grass to which it is applied, beneficial as well as weedy, treated areas must be resown when the dalapon has become inactive — usually in 3 to 4 weeks. To treat individual weed plants with dalapon, put on a rubber glove with a cotton glove over it. Moisten the cotton glove with the weedkiller and pull the foliage through it, being careful not to get dalapon on desirable grass, or on the hands.



**SPEEDWELL (*Veronica peregrina*) and other (*Veronica* sp.)**



Several related species of creeping annuals that commonly invade lawns are collectively called speedwells. The leaves are often placed opposite, but in *V. peregrina* they are opposite on the lower stem and alternate on upper stems. The flowers may be white or blue and are borne in the leaf axils. Speedwells are reproduced from seed.

**CONTROL:** Apply 2,4,5-TP or endothal during the growing season.

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